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Mr Richard North
Headteacher
Wolverley CofE Secondary School
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Dear Mr North

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when Andrew Stafford and I inspected your school on Wednesday 22nd September 2010. I appreciate the time you gave to our phone discussions and to gathering the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass my thanks to the students for the time they gave to share their views with us.

Since the last inspection, a deputy headteacher and two assistant headteacher have been appointed. The deputy has responsibility for the curriculum, an assistant head teacher leads teaching and learning and the other leads on all aspects related to the school's specialism.

As a result of the inspection on 23-24 September 2008, the school was asked to:

- provide more opportunities for students to work collaboratively and encourage them to develop skills as independent learners
- eliminate low-level disruption by consistent implementation of agreed strategies for managing behaviour
- involve learners in their own assessment so that they gain a clearer understanding of what they need to do to improve their work and reach their individual targets
- evaluate more regularly the quality of teaching, and judge its effectiveness in terms of its impact on the learning and progress of students.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

The 2010 GCSE results are the school's most impressive yet because students are making better progress than was the case at the last inspection. The school has implemented a far more robust system of monitoring students' progress and this indicates that attainment in the school is much closer to the national average. There has not been a consistent trend of improvement since the last inspection, a fact reflected in the Year 11 students attaining lower results in 2009 than was the case in 2008. The dip in results in 2009 was linked to the weaknesses identified at the last inspection. However, in the last two years the improvements made to provision have accelerated, enabling the school to reverse the decline. In 2008 and 2009, students of lower ability made inadequate progress. In the past two years the school has improved the curriculum for these students so they are now making satisfactory progress. With the support of the local authority the school's senior leadership team ensured a sharp improvement in the 2010 GCSE results in mathematics and these were close to the national average. The implementation of a vocational curriculum in science more relevant to students' needs and interests is resulting in comparable improvement in this subject. In recent years generally, outcomes in English have been stronger than those in mathematics and science, but results dipped in 2010 because of inconsistencies in staffing. There have been important improvements in students' attitudes to learning and as a result behaviour is better. Students are also more confident in tackling problems and cope far better when mistakes are made.

The improvement in students' attitudes and achievement is a direct result of more effective leadership, particularly by the school's senior leadership team. Students are now receiving well-targeted support, particularly in Year 11. The 'access lodge' has been developed in order to better meet the needs of the small minority of students who struggle to cope in lessons. This high-quality provision and a much more consistent implementation of the school's behaviour management policy has reduced the incidence of low-level disruption. All students are experiencing a much better curriculum, especially in Years 10 and 11. The school has a much more accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and the use of assessment as a result of much more regular monitoring of lessons. All leaders are becoming more skilled in how they are using information about students' progress to confirm the effectiveness of teaching. Inspectors' judgements about the quality of teaching corroborated strongly those of the school. There is a commendable willingness to take a long-term view of securing further improvement and the school is refreshingly candid about its relative weaknesses. Leaders are ensuring improvement by holding teachers to account for the progress their students make and by professional development that is well matched to the needs of staff. There are now major strengths in the school's monitoring in addition to a developing a track record of improved outcomes for students.

All lessons now have clear objectives and there is a much more consistent approach to actively involving students in lessons. In most lessons, a good variety of activities is used to maintain students' engagement. Students work together much more frequently and collaboratively. These improvements have contributed to better



behaviour and enhanced enjoyment of lessons. Students receive more guidance about how they can attain their challenging targets and they have many more opportunities to assess their own work. Students said they are learning more because they are being made much more aware of the criteria used for assessment. From Year 10 onwards, students undertake more vocational courses that include opportunities to independently undertake a range of assignments. There are relatively fewer opportunities for students in Years 7 to 9 to undertake independent tasks in which they can influence the lines of enquiry.

Students progress particularly well when working independently in lessons that include regular reviews of learning and timed targets that are reinforced throughout. Inspectors saw relatively little reviewing of learning and, as a result, there were occasions when students worked with insufficient urgency. Students of all abilities were effectively challenged in about half the lessons seen. In some lessons, students are not sufficiently challenged because there is a lack of clarity about how to achieve the higher-level learning needed for them to excel. Generally, students learnt most where teachers combined good subject knowledge with an emphasis on higher-order thinking. For instance, an English teacher effectively challenged low-attaining students by involving them in identifying how they could judge how successful their own learning was and by focussing on how they could think more analytically about improvements to a leaflet.

The impact of the school's music specialism has been limited because of the concentration on other priorities that have the most immediate effect on improving students' progress. Nevertheless, there have been a number of successful musical events that have enhanced the pride students have in their school. In addition, the specialism has helped better meet the needs of gifted and talented students. The recent appointment of new senior leader means the school is well placed to increase the influence of the specialism.

The impact of external support is good. The improvements to monitoring and evaluation have been influenced by the active involvement of senior leaders in well-timed local authority reviews of teaching and learning. Consultants have been highly instrumental in achieving the improvements to behaviour and students' progress, particularly those in science and mathematics. Senior staff welcomed the critical insights provided by their School Improvement Partner.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick
Her Majesty's Inspector

